

OPEN LETTER TO MR. RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN, PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

Geneva-Paris, July 30, 2009

Re: Ongoing arbitrary detention of 32 trade union leaders

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), wishes to express its deep concern about the ongoing arbitrary detention of 32 leaders of the Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions (KESK) and of its affiliates, including the teachers' trade union Egitim-Sen.

According to the information received from the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), on May 28, 2009, KESK's headquarters in Ankara, its branch offices in İzmir and Van, and even the houses and workplaces of some of its members were raided and searched by the Gendarmerie. They searched the office of Ms. **Songül Morsümbül**, KESK Women Secretary, and confiscated all official documents regarding gender issues and trade union activities, as well as a laptop and 18 CDs, as if it were criminal evidence. These proceedings were carried out by the Gendarmerie, whereas Turkish ad hoc legislation stipulates that, if required, they should have been carried out by the Public Prosecutor's office.

On May 28, 2009, 35 trade union leaders were arrested and detained, of which 22 remain in prison to date. They are detained in "F-Type" prisons, or small group isolation prisons. Ten KESK members and leaders were already in prison before that time.

All this time, the Turkish judiciary has kept the cases "under secrecy", meaning that lawyers are not allowed to access their clients' files until the Prosecutor's office prepares the indictments. No indictment was prepared as of now.

The 32 unionists currently imprisoned are: Ms. Songül Morsunbul, KESK Women's Secretary, Ms. **Gülçin Isbert**, Egitim-Sen Women's Secretary, Mr. **Abdurrahman Dasedemir**, former KESK Secretary General, Ms. **Elif Akgül Ates**, former Egitim-Sen Women's Secretary, Mr. **Lami Özgen**, Egitim-Sen Ankara Branch member, Mr. **Haydar Deniz**, Egitim-Sen İzmir/Bergama representative, Ms. **Mine Cetinkaya**, Egitim-Sen İzmir Branch member, Ms. **Sermin Günes**, Egitim-Sen İzmir Branch member, Mr. **Nihat Keni**, Egitim-Sen İzmir Branch member, Mr. **Mehmet Hanifi Kuris**, Egitim-Sen İzmir Branch member, Ms. **Sakine Esen Yilmaz**, Egitim-Sen İzmir Branch member, Mr. **Aydin Güngörmez**, Egitim-Sen İzmir Branch member, Mr. **Mustafa Beyazbal**, Egitim-Sen İzmir Branch member, Mr. **Harun Gündes**, Egitim-Sen İzmir Branch member, Mr. **Abdulcelil Demir**, Egitim-Sen İzmir Branch member, Ms. **Yüksel Özmen**, SES İzmir Branch Law Secretary, Ms. **Meryem Çag**, BES İzmir Branch workplace representative, Mr. **Hasan Soysal**, BTS İzmir Branch member, Mr. **Aziz Akikloglu**, Egitim-Sen Manisa/Turgutlu Branch member, Mr. **Hasan Umar**, Egitim-Sen Van Branch member, Ms. **Sueyda Demir**, Egitim-Sen İzmir Branch member, Ms. **Yüksel Mutlu**, Turkey Peace Assembly member, Mr. **Onder Dogan**, Egitim-Sen Sivas Branch President, Mr. **Nejat Sezginer**, President of the United Trade Union of Transport Employees (BTS) Sivas Branch, Mr. **Cezmi Gunduz**, President of the Egitim-Sen Branch Agri Branch, Mr. **Ali Cengiz**, Former President of the Egitim-Sen Agri Branch, Mr. **Bisar Polat**, Postal, Telecommunication and Media Workers' Union (Haber-Sen) Agri representative, Ms. **Seher Tumer**, Trade Union of Public Employees in Health and Social Services (SES) Ankara Branch board member, Ms. **Olcay Kanlibas**, former SES

headquarters' executive board member, Mr. **Erdal Guzel**, Egitim-Sen Istanbul nr. 4 Branch member, Ms. **Emriye Demirkir**, Egitim-Sen Tekirdag Branch member, Ms. **Selma Aslan**, Municipality Workers' Union (Tum-Bel-Sen) Van Branch member.

In addition, according to the information received, living conditions in the prison where the unionists are being held are bad, and several of the imprisoned women have been sexually and otherwise harassed. The Observatory is also very worried about the health of one of the female detainees, Ms. Elif Akgül Ates, which would have seriously deteriorated.

The Observatory fears that the 32 above-mentioned trade union leaders were arbitrarily detained because of their activities in favour of labour rights. Accordingly, it calls upon the Turkish authorities to guarantee in all circumstances their physical and psychological integrity as well as to release all of them immediately and unconditionally in the absence of any valid ground for such detention.

The Observatory also urges the Turkish authorities to put an end to all acts harassment, including at the judicial level, against all human rights defenders in Turkey and to comply with the [1998 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#), with the [Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on Council of Europe action to improve the protection of human rights defenders and promote their activities](#), and with the 2007 Resolution of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on Strengthening OSCE Engagement with Human Rights Defenders and National Human Rights Institutions.

We express our sincere hope that you will take these considerations and requests into account,

Yours sincerely,

Souhayr Belhassen
FIDH President

Eric Sottas
OMCT Secretary General